



Natural Resources Conservation Service
675 US Courthouse
801 Broadway
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

September 5, 2007

TO: NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICT SUPERVISORS

Tennessee Soil Conservation Districts (SCD's) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have worked as cooperative partners in support of agricultural conservation for over 60 years. However, it has always been the locally led efforts of community stakeholders that help identify concerns, implement solutions, and evaluate results that solve the many local natural resource needs throughout Tennessee.

Locally led conservation begins with the community itself working through the local Conservation District. It is based on the principle that community stakeholders are best suited to deal with local resource problems. It challenges urban and rural neighbors to work together and take responsibility for addressing local resource needs. The local SCD should convene the LWG meeting.

It is important to keep in mind that locally led conservation must be driven by natural resource conservation needs rather than by legislated programs. The primary focus of locally led conservation should be to identify natural resource concerns, along with related economic and social concerns.

As a result, SCD's have an essential role in the implementation of USDA cost-share programs. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) for fiscal year 2008 needs local involvement and input through the locally led process to strengthen our commitment to cooperative conservation and partnerships.

For planning purposes, we expect current Fiscal Year National EQIP allocations to remain at 2007 levels. For fiscal year 2008, NRCS Tennessee will again set aside a base amount of approximately \$55,000 in financial assistance for each county in the state to implement the EQIP. This should equate to approximately 50 percent of the states' annual EQIP allocation. The remaining funds will be spent on state priorities. Adjustments to the county base dollars will be made once all the initial EQIP applications are funded. Reallocation of funds will then be made to focus on the remaining unfunded applications.

The 2002 Farm Bill says that local Soil Conservation Districts will convene these meetings. It is important that each SCD have at least two meetings in order to set the local priorities. The first meeting to be held will be a Stakeholder Input Meeting (SIM). The Local Work Group meeting should be held after the SIM. In order to begin funding contracts very early in the fiscal year, these meetings need to be completed by October 15, 2007. Meeting this deadline is very important in order to get contracts funded in time for spring seeding and construction periods.



This year it becomes especially important as a new Farm Bill is making its way through Congress. Once the Farm Bill is signed by the President, it becomes effective immediately. All versions of the Farm Bill seen so far contain eligibility changes. If we obligate early, we can use existing program rules. If we wait, some applicants will no longer be eligible. NRCS Chief Lancaster is encouraging us to have all funds obligated by December 31, 2007.

NRCS has developed tools that will assist the SCD and NRCS field offices to conduct successful meetings. Designated conservationists will ensure that all SCD Board Members receive a packet of information. The packet will contain objectives of the program, an example of a meeting agenda, policy, and roles and responsibilities, to name a few. We hope this information will help enhance the role of your Local Work Group.

This joint letter will serve as the springboard for the Stakeholder Input and the Local Work Group meetings in these next few weeks.

NRCS will continue to support the locally led conservation effort by:

- Providing assistance in identifying conservation needs.
- Providing technical and program advice to the community stakeholders throughout the effort.
- Assisting in developing and implementing strategies to include socially and economically disadvantaged groups in the locally led effort.

The role of NRCS is to support this process and provide technical information.

Your enthusiasm, support, and involvement are much appreciated, especially during these next few weeks. Locally led and cooperative conservation have always been the hallmark in solving our resource concerns together.

We are very excited about the success last year in redirecting funding in this manner to implement EQIP and better address local resource needs. We know that Local Work Groups will build on that success this year. There are a few changes in the process for 2008, and we again stand ready to assist with those changes or any other issues that may arise.

After you have received and reviewed your packet, please feel free to contact either of us directly or John Rissler, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, at (615) 277-2567; or Danny Sells, TACD Executive Director, at (423) 737-7667.

Together we jointly agree to support this effort to help people help the land.

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KEVIN BROWN
State Conservationist

BARRY LAKE
President, Tennessee Association of
Conservation Districts

cc:

John Rissler, ASTC (Programs), NRCS, Nashville, TN

John McClurkan, Administrator, Water Resources Programs, TDA, Nashville, TN

Jim Nance, Program Mgr., Agricultural Resources Program, TDA, Nashville, TN

Danny Sells, Exec. Dir., TACD, Gray, TN